THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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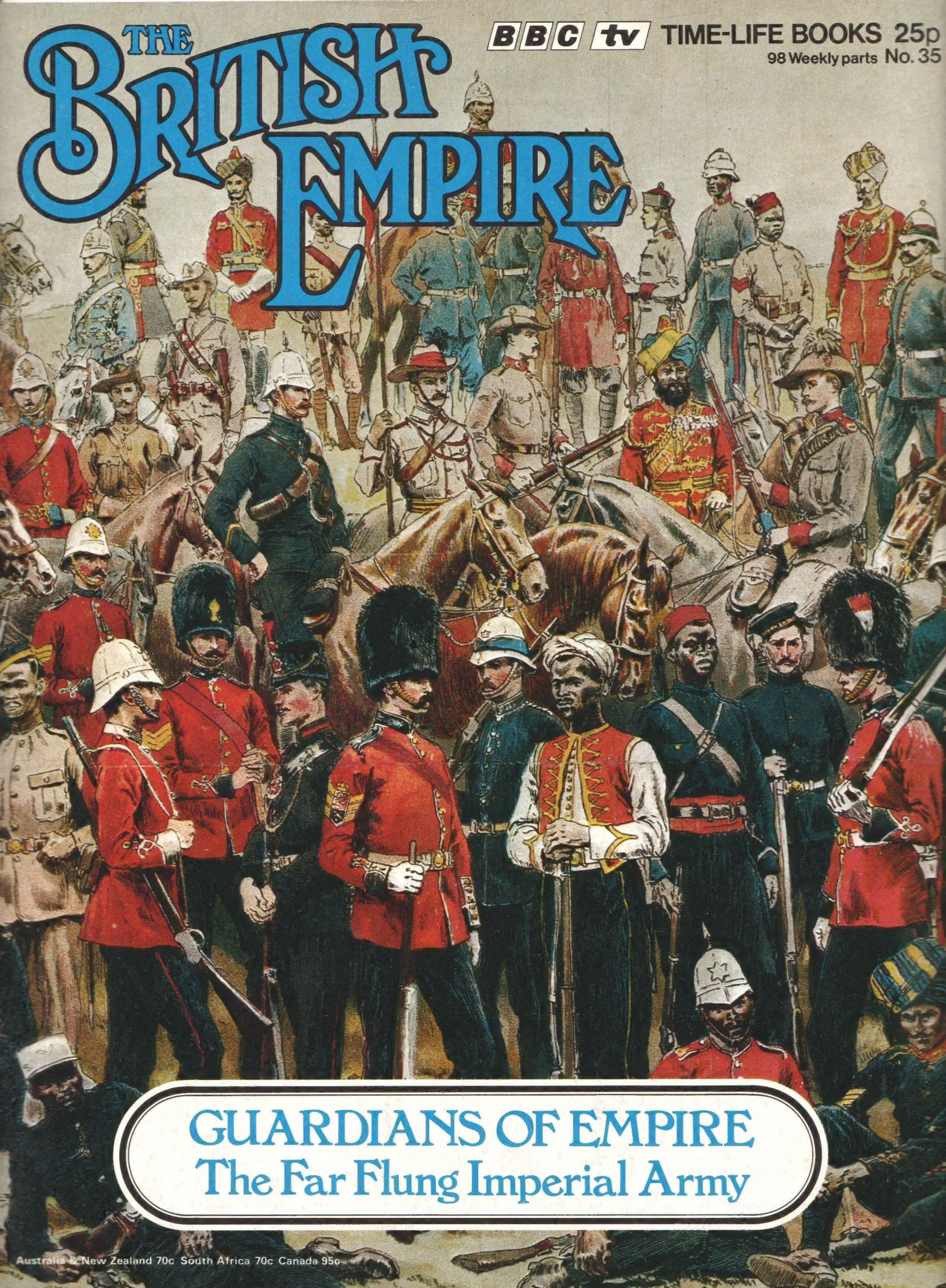

GUARDIANS OF EMPIRE
The Far Flung Imperial Army

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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BY THE WAY

A nation's view of its salient characteristics is, as often as not, likely to have been created by the writings of its most influential historians. Thus, as Correlli Barnett, the author of this issue, points out in the introduction to his excellent book, *Britain and Her Army*, "The importance of war and military institutions has been generally neglected in British historical writing, whose tone has been set by the Whig and liberal emphasis on peaceful constitutional progress. In this liberal view war appears as an aberration, an interruption of a 'natural' condition of peace: almost as a form of delinquency."

In Mr. Barnett's opinion, such an interpretation denies the facts of British history, whose course, he argues, "has been shaped by war and by military institutions. The liberal optimism and pacifism of the nineteenth century themselves were made possible by victory over Napoleon, a victory consummated by a British general and partly by British troops at Waterloo; liberalism was guarded by the largest navy in the world and by a mercenary army more continually in action than any of the armies of the militaristic nations of Europe."

Nevertheless, says Mr. Barnett, the influential British historians have made an unfavourable contrast between "what they believe to be the orderly evolution of [British] parliamentary institutions and economic progress with the wars and armies and tyrannies of Europe." As a consequence, the army has been neglected until external events have made it essential to rebuild it. "The history of the British army, then," Mr. Barnett sums up, "is of recurrent need rending aside the anti-military illusions of the nation. . . . It is the history of an institution alternately neglected by the nation or trustingly looked to in times of fright."

In this issue Mr. Barnett explains how this attitude affected the Imperial army during the course of the 19th Century.

All letters please to: **The British Empire, 76 Oxford Street, London, W.1**

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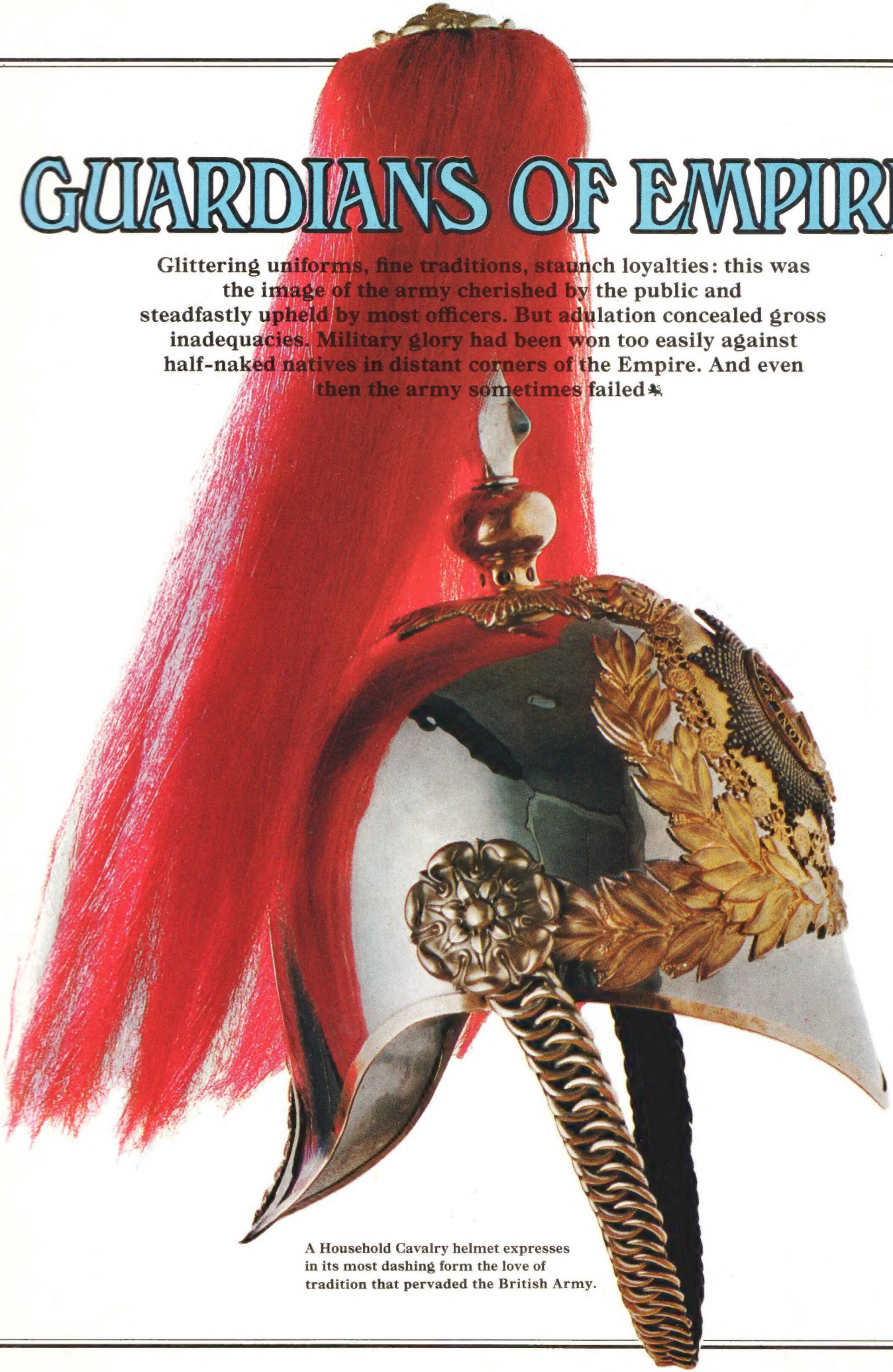
GUARDIANS OF EMPIRE

Glittering uniforms, fine traditions, staunch loyalties: this was the image of the army cherished by the public and steadfastly upheld by most officers. But adulation concealed gross inadequacies. Military glory had been won too easily against half-naked natives in distant corners of the Empire. And even then the army sometimes failed.



A Household Cavalry helmet expresses in its most dashing form the love of tradition that pervaded the British Army.

By Correlli Barnett

The story of the British Army in the 19th Century is the story of the Empire's wars. The army fought Chinese and Afghans, Abyssinians and Maoris, Zulus and Sudanese, Boers and Canadians. Its Victorian battle-honours are nothing less than a roll-call of Empire; or more prosaically, a gazetteer of Africa, the Near East and Asia. Indeed, the British professional army owes its very existence to the growth of the British Empire.

The traditional English military institution was the Militia which any able-bodied citizen could join. Until the early 18th Century the English were consumed with a violent hatred and suspicion of professional standing armies, which they regarded as the obedient instruments of royal tyrants for the destruction of Parliamentary government and political liberty. Throughout the 17th Century, when European monarchies had already created highly organized standing armies, the English Parliament resisted all attempts by the Stuart kings to create a permanent royal standing army under their direct control.

The Militia, being merely English society with a weapon in its hand, presented no political dangers; indeed, it was, and was seen to be, a safeguard of national liberties against potentially absolute kings. And militarily it was perfectly adequate for the home defence of an island kingdom with a strong navy – adequate, that is, in the simple era of the longbow for tasks like repelling the Scots or putting down local rebellion.

However, the English Civil War had demonstrated that for a long war, even at home, the Militia was obsolete. And a succession of repeated wars and internal emergencies, from 1661 – just after the restoration of Charles II – until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, gradually led to the establishment of a standing professional British army – much against the wish of Parliament, which continued to pretend that the army was just an emergency creation which could be abolished once normal times returned.

However, "normal times" never did return. For in the 18th Century there were not only four more great conflicts with the French monarchy, but also a steady expansion of the British Empire: in India, in North America, in the Caribbean. It was these foreign wars and colonial conquests which finally forced a permanent professional army down the throat of the British. And the colonial conquests, once made, required garrisons: a function beyond the compass of part-time citizen forces, whose members disliked leaving their own country, let alone spending ten years in some fever-stricken Caribbean sugar island.

So it was that the British in the 18th Century, like the ancient Greeks and Romans before them, discovered that the acquisition of an Empire brought with it the creation of a regular army made up of professionals. By the late 18th Century the army had been grudgingly accepted by the British as a permanent feature of the national life.

It was already in effect an imperial army. Though the American colonies were lost in 1783, by then India was ready to replace America as Britain's greatest imperial possession, with some 6,000 troops of the Crown as part of its garrison. Ireland, Britain's oldest and most disaffected colony, demanded 12,000; the other parts of the Empire drew in another 15,000 men. In England, Scotland and Wales, there were no more than some 17,000 men.

Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815 ended the need for an army capable of serving as a field force in major European wars. For the prestige of Wellington's victory gave British diplomacy an unbeatable leverage that lasted until the creation of a united Germany in 1871. The British Empire, on the other hand, kept on expanding by a self-perpetuating process that governments seemed powerless to stop. In the haphazard imperial expansion of the Victorian Age it was the army rather than the navy which now became the tangible instrument of British power. By 1840 three-quarters of the infantrymen of the British Army were serving abroad; and out of 103 battalions, 21 were somewhere in the tropics and another 20 were stationed in India.

So completely was the British Army an imperial instrument that it was too weak to protect the United Kingdom itself, and too weak to lend any support to British policy in Europe. In 1846, when

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The British square, seen here at the Battle of Tamai in 1884, was the most revered of the army's battle formations. Its bristling bayonets and murderous fire shattered Napoleon's columns at Waterloo in 1815 and many a crudely armed native foe thereafter as Victorian imperialism spread.

But, as this picture shows, there was a

limit to what flesh and blood – even the most highly disciplined – could stand. Men of the York and Lancaster Regiment broke (see numbers 1 and 2) under the furious assaults of half-crazed Sudanese warriors. Fortunately for the embattled British force, the soldiers who broke ranks were so impressed by the steadiness of the square fighting alongside them that they recovered their nerve and drove the spear-wielding Dervishes out of the square, reformed the line and saved the day.

1 The broken square.
2 York and Lancaster Regiment.
3 Commander-in-Chief and Staff.
4 Black Watch.
5 Royal Marine Light Infantry.
6 10th and 19th Hussars.
7 Naval Brigade.
8 Royal Irish Fusiliers.
9 Gordon Highlanders.
10 King's Own Royal Rifle Corps.
11 Naval Brigade counter-attacking.
12 Royal Marine Artillery.

SCENES FROM A SOLDIER'S LIFE

Edred, the hero of the tale, is a young officer fresh from Sandhurst who is sent to Bombay for his first posting. There he is wined and dined, but he gorges himself on guavas and mangoes, and drinks too much wine, "whereof few stomachs stand at first the test."

Soon recovered from over indulgence, Edred departs for the Persian Gulf to harry a band of Arabs. Ignoring the arrow that pierces his cap, he wins great praise by "vanquishing their leader hand to hand, no common feat o'er one of Eastern land."

For the romantic reading public of Regency England, the army, just at the beginning of its long involvement in imperial campaigning, offered an exhilarating subject of war and adventure. It was a taste amply catered for by the vivid illustrations and atrocious verse of *The Life of a Soldier,* by William Heath, from which these pictures are taken.

His next assignment is in Spain where he sees combat in the Peninsular War against Napoleon's army. Captured by the French, he escapes and shows his mettle at the Battle of Salamanca in 1812, where "his deeds of single arm extolled his name, and gave new trophies to his house's shield."

Before returning home the army found itself in the forbidding passes of the Pyrenees. But Edred and his companions kept their spirits up, sustained by the memory of Lord Wellington telling them "that more gallantry and zeal he never witnessed."

war with France seemed imminent, it was reckoned that Britain could only scrape together a field force of between 5,000 and 10,000 men. Lord Palmerston, the then Foreign Secretary, stated that "this Empire was existing only by the forbearance of other powers." And at the end of the 19th Century, on the eve of the Boer War, despite repeated and partially successful attempts to bring the troops home to repair British weakness in Europe, the British Army still remained essentially an imperial force, with almost half of its strength on colonial stations or in India. India in 1897 swallowed 52 infantry battalions, a garrison more than twice as large as those in all other imperial possessions put together.

Thanks to this professional, volunteer army scattered across the globe, the Victorians as a whole never felt the burdens of world power. The middle classes in their prosperous suburbs were not called upon to furnish officers to die in China, the Gold Coast or Egypt; the respectable lower middle classes in their neat redbrick streets were not called upon to furnish non-commissioned officers or privates to expire of enteric fever, cholera or heat-stroke in the Sudan, India or southern Africa.

If the British citizenry in general had been obliged to go and fight its small wars, or endure tedious years in its hot garrison stations, it may well be doubted whether Britain would ever have acquired the Empire at all, let alone held on to it. For statesman too, war was a noise far away, demanding little and leading them to believe that general peace in Europe could be preserved through diplomacy. It was thus the professional army that enabled the Empire to come into existence and to become a source of popular pride rather than an unpopular burden.

The imperial role of the army moulded more than attitudes to Empire: it also moulded the character of the army itself. In the first place, its organization was totally unlike that of continental armies in the 19th Century. It hardly existed as "an army," in the sense of a large field force organized into divisions and corps, under a single chain of command headed by a general staff. Instead it was scattered throughout the Empire. Where a battalion might be in a remote coaling station, a couple of battalions elsewhere pacifying some dissidents, a brigade would be engaged thousands of miles away on some punitive expedition.

In operation, the imperial army was highly specialized. It laid emphasis on the variety of its work; on smallness of scale; on overwhelming superiority of equipment, making little provision for fighting an enemy of equal strength; on minute casualties and easy victories.

The personal qualities demanded of the officers and men were likewise a product of the army's Empire-wide responsibilities. The scattering of forces in penny packets threw emphasis on the regiment as a closed family and the framework of military life. At the same time, small-scale wars against ill-armed and ill-organized natives fostered the "regimental" military qualities as the principal ingredients of military success – discipline, personal bravery and boldness in combat. On the other hand, the regimental approach led to the relative neglect of the intellectual and organizational requirements necessary for the conduct of modern war. The Sikhs of India, for example, were among the most disciplined and formidable of the enemies the British met during the Victorian Age, yet to beat them did not call for any of the tactical and technical skills needed for success in combating a European army. Of the victory over the Sikhs at the Battle of Gujerat in 1849 an observer of the battle wrote:

"The right brigade of cavalry was ordered to charge, which they did in splendid style, cutting the enemy down in all directions, and driving them back in disorder. By this time, the fighting had become general along the whole line: roll after roll of musketry rent the air, and clouds of smoke rose high and thick, while death was dealt out without mercy; now was heard the well-known cry of 'Victory.' With levelled bayonets we charged; but they could not stand the shock of cold steel. They gave way in all directions."

Nearly 50 years after this classic description of 18th-Century action, in the Sudan campaign of 1898, little had changed in the British Army's style of fighting, despite the invention of the machine-gun, quick-firing field-artillery, the bolt-action magazine rifle and smokeless powder. Drawn up at Omdurman in lines as at Waterloo, the army destroyed the Dervishes with formal volleys. Yet European armies, led by Germany, had long abandoned such parade-ground tactics in favour of small dispersed groups of men making the best possible use of cover, and firing individually.

How hopelessly out of touch with modern tactical developments the imperial role had left the British Army was shown during the first stages of the Boer War in 1899 when all the courage and discipline of the British line could not avail against the accurate, long-range rifle-fire of the almost invisible Boers, lying prone in the folds of the veld. The British soldiers' mindless obedience was defeated by the intelligence and initiative of the Afrikaners.

In higher leadership and organization in the field, too, the imperial role caused the British military outlook and method to diverge further and further from those of other great powers. After 1870, especially, European military chiefs became concerned with a single great professional task: the perfecting of the fast mobilization and deployment of a mass army for a great continental war. The British continued to concentrate on how to meet a succession of more or less minor emergencies in different parts of the world.

Whereas the European armies' tasks required scientific study, deep technical knowledge and high managerial skill, the British Army came to depend on improvisation at the last moment. Whereas all European armies developed a general staff as the collective brains of what had become a "big business," the British depended on the personal resourcefulness of individual commanders – men who became Victorian heroes, like Lord Roberts of Kandahar ("Bobs"), Lord Kitchener of Khartoum ("K. of K.") and Sir Garnet Wolseley ("All Sir Garnet").

When Wolseley marched to Kumasi in 1873–74 to crush the Ashanti under their King, Kofi, he had to organize his own field force and all its logistics on the spot, besides constructing his own road and bridges through the jungle. His much greater expedition to Egypt in 1882, leading to the defeat of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir, was yet another improvisation. At first it worked well, when

A smooth-tongued recruiting sergeant at a country pub persuades a wide-eyed farm-boy to join George IV's army. In the early 19th Century, susceptible country youths, lured by tales of glory and a few pence, were favourite targets for the recruiting-parties who toured remote areas.

40,000 troops and 41,000 tons of supplies were conveyed without hitch to Egypt. However, his supply and transport arrangements later broke down, holding up his advance on Cairo. Wolseley's attempt to relieve Gordon in 1884–85 in Khartoum failed because even his remarkable energy and resourcefulness could not solve the problems of marshalling transport and supply in time.

Lord Roberts, who became a hero as a result of his famous march to relieve the British garrison in Kandahar during the Second Afghan War of 1879 also had to create all his own supply and transport arrangements at the beginning of the campaign. The results would not have impressed any of the contemporary European powers' general staffs.

Kitchener, who in 1898 organized and led the expedition that recaptured Khartoum and destroyed the Dervish power in the Sudan, was a supreme example of the British faith in a man instead of a system. Kitchener himself was an intense and secretive egotist who communicated his plans to no one. His office methods were absolutely chaotic; everything was in his head. There could be no greater contrast to the intricate and complex methods by now prevailing in the German and French armies. In the event, Kitchener was successful in his improvisation, combining river steamers with railways and camel transport, and organizing his supply lines as he advanced up the Nile by stages. Nevertheless, the fact remained that his command numbered only some 15,000 men and his enemies were savage tribesmen armed with antique weapons. His final victory at Omdurman was won at the miniscule cost of fewer than 50 casualties.

Thus while the British Army in the 19th Century adequately met the demands of the imperial role – despite the occasional disaster – it became less and less fit to fight a modern war against a great power. At the same time, since few of the army's imperial foes took advantage of its want of professionalism, colonial victories created a dangerous impression at home that wars were distant and exotic adventure stories, combats to be won by a hero, and all essentially painless to the nation as a whole. Like the British Army itself, the Victorian public lost its sense of propor-

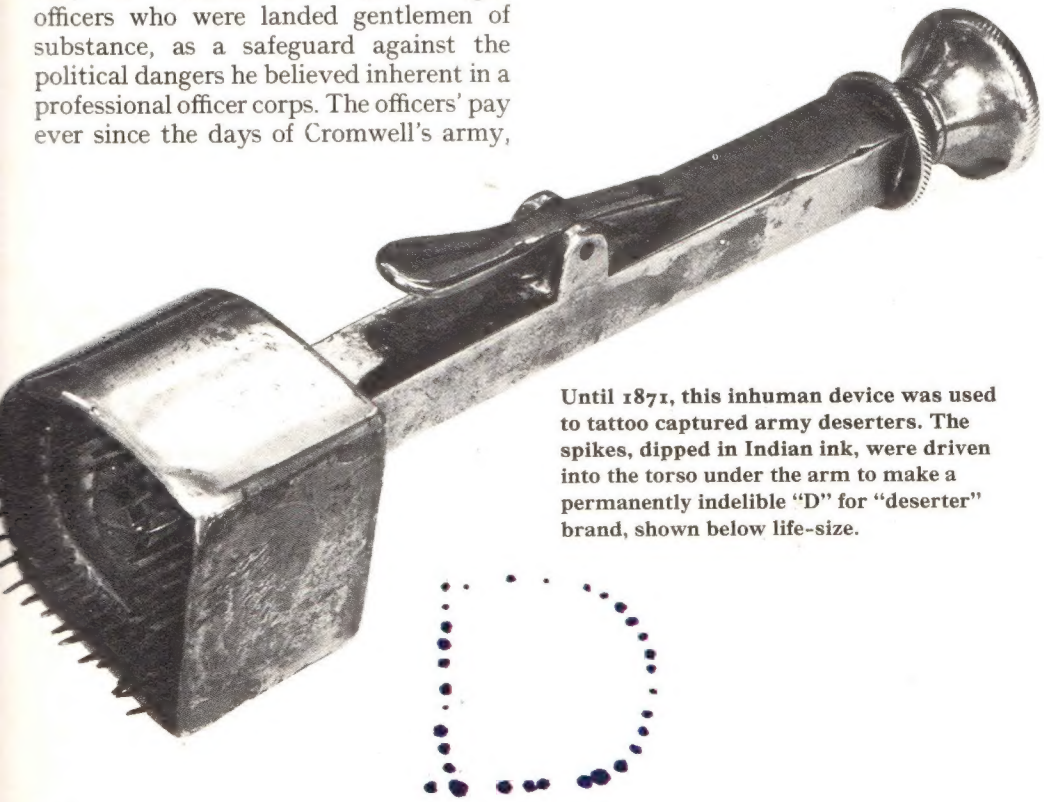
tion. The defence of Rorke's Drift by 200 men against the Zulus in 1879 became the work of a Wellington, and the miniature victories won by Kitchener, Roberts and Wolseley were hailed as the triumphs of a latter-day Marlborough.

The professional army, since it was far away and bore the burden of Empire easily, was not a primary object of national care. Several traditions had combined to remove the army as an institution from the main stream of British life. There was the inveterate suspicion, dating from the time of the Stuarts, of the political dangers of an efficient army. There was the vicious circle of low pay, appalling conditions of service and brutal discipline, which by the early 19th Century had rendered military service hardly less of a disgrace than prison to the "respectable" working and lower middle classes. There was the imperial role itself, which took the army away from the heart of the nation at home – a role differing radically from that vital task of national preservation enjoyed by European armies. For all these reasons the Victorian army was an institution on which Parliament and people resented spending money.

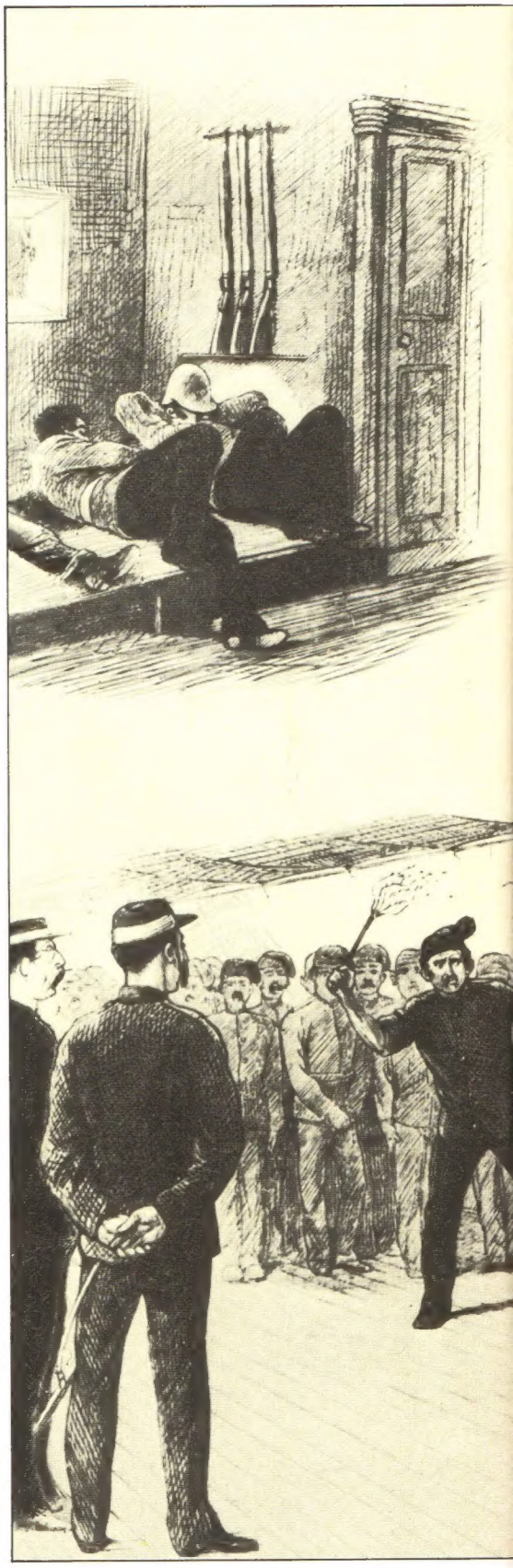
Financial stringency coupled with the army's low prestige among the lower classes as a career or occupation, coloured the whole of military life. But the army still attracted its officers from the apex of the Victorian social pyramid. Wellington, as Commander-in-Chief, sought officers who were landed gentlemen of substance, as a safeguard against the political dangers he believed inherent in a professional officer corps. The officers' pay ever since the days of Cromwell's army, had never been sufficient to live on. The officers always had to be able to dip into their own pockets to support themselves; many of them went farther and used their own funds to clothe and equip their regiments above the regulation scale.

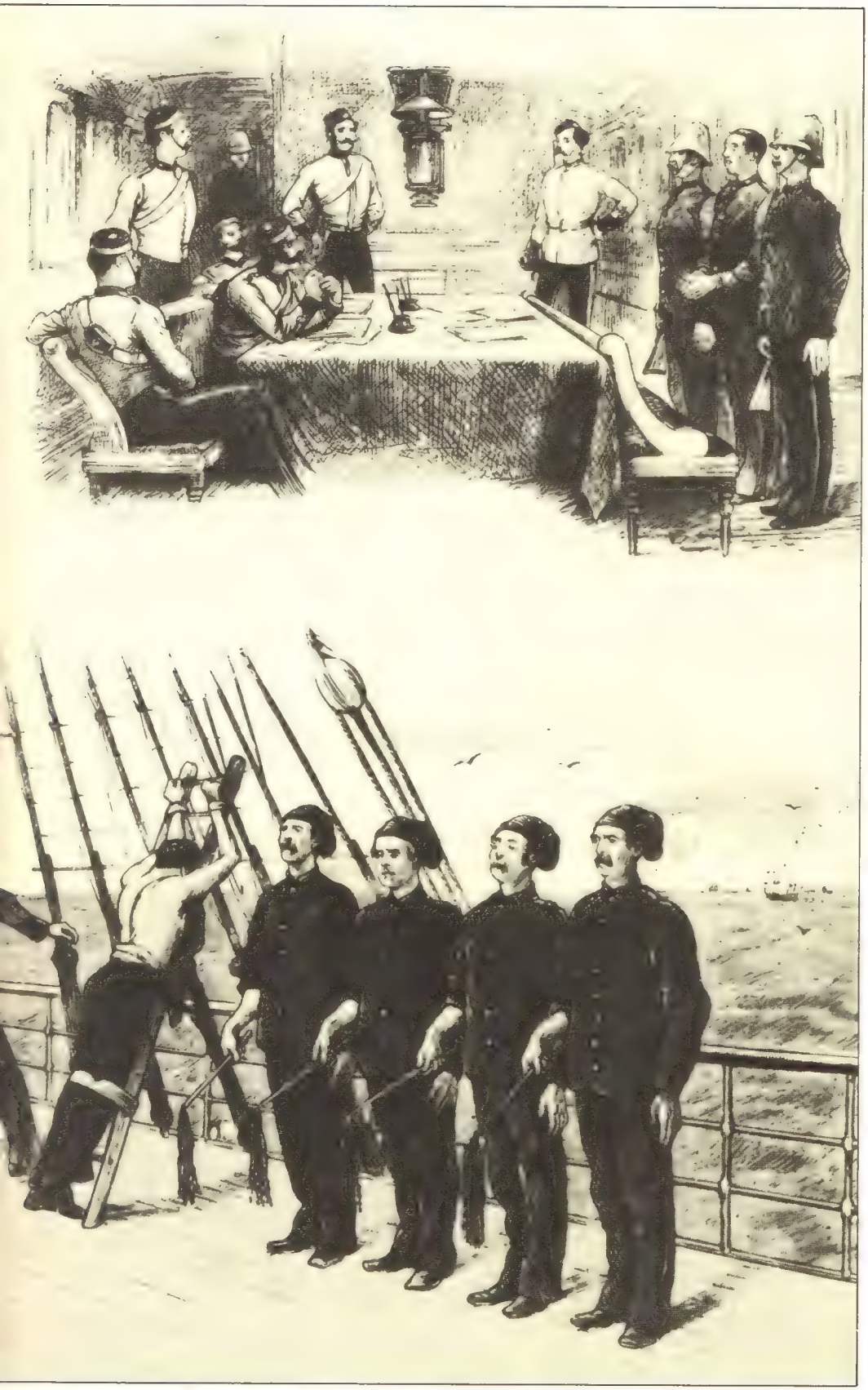
The paramount position of the wealthy, upper class among the officers was finally assured by the peculiar institution of "purchase." Commissions and the commands of regiments were bought and sold – for anything up to £14,000 – until the abolition of purchase in 1872. It was a survival of a custom in government services that had been universal throughout Europe in the 17th Century, though the Prussian and French armies had long since abolished it. The hold of the rich and well-born was only barely relaxed; there remained the need for a private income to maintain a lavish social life, especially in the fashionable regiments that dominated the life and higher posts of the army, and this effectively kept out all but a few middle-class career officers.

The combination of rich upper-class origins with the peculiarly limited professional horizon of the regiment produced an officer with high natural qualities of leadership, ideal for commanding the simple type of man in the rank and file: brave and hardy in the field and adequate to the demands of the unsophisticated, small-scale warfare of imperial conquest.



Until 1871, this inhuman device was used to tattoo captured army deserters. The spikes, dipped in Indian ink, were driven into the torso under the arm to make a permanently indelible "D" for "deserter" brand, shown below life-size.





A soldier who slept on duty – whether on a troopship, as in the scene shown here, or in garrison – could expect ferocious punishment. On July 12, 1879, readers of the London *Graphic* gasped at these drawings which depict the offender's arrest; imprisonment in the guardroom, court martial and savage flogging.

However, the British officer was largely lacking in intellectual curiosity, in the wider study and understanding of war, and in all that is implied by a professional outlook. Too much of the British officer's time and attention were occupied with the social aspects of army life: hunting, polo, dinners and balls.

It was notable that the officers of the Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery, corps to which purchase nad never applied and which had always had a more professional and middle-class character, were the most efficient in the army, and that the cavalry were at once the most fashionable and highly bred, and the most incompetent branch.

The officer entered the army in one of three ways: by direct recommendation from a well-connected family friend to the colonel of a regiment; as a step up from service in the Militia; or via the two army colleges – the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, for cavalry and infantry, or the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, for engineers and gunners. There was little formal training for those who entered a regiment directly; the officer picked up the rudiments as he went along. The course at Woolwich was narrowly technical; that at Sandhurst a polite farce.

The training of staff officers and the higher study of warfare were both neglected during the Victorian epoch. But after the frightful muddle in the Crimean War exposed the inadequacy of methods and training good enough for beating Sikhs, what had been the Senior Department of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, burgeoned forth in 1857 as the Staff College. However, the courses were in general too limited and technical, devoted to matters like fortification and surveying rather than to the managerial and strategic handling of great armies as taught to officers in the French and German staff colleges.

It was this unimaginative, reactionary training which W.S.Gilbert parodied unmercifully in 1879 with the song of Major-General Stanley, the "modern major-general" in *The Pirates of Penzance*. For the Major-General had qualified for his high position with an unrivalled, if somewhat dry-as-dust knowledge of the traditional subjects – history, classics, mathematics – but, as he reveals, knew nothing whatever of modern military matters.

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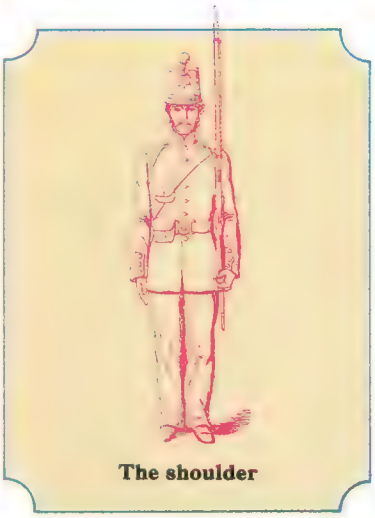
THE TOY SOLDIER

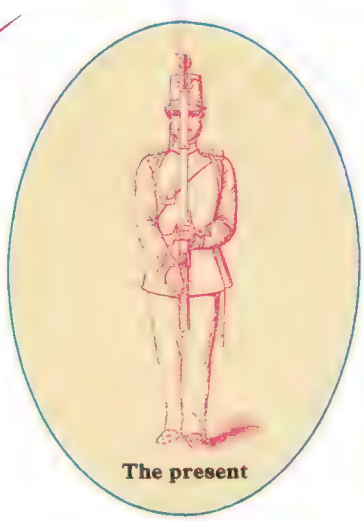
For the mid-Victorian infantryman, little had changed since the Napoleonic Wars. Training in modern tactics hardly existed. The infantryman was judged by his toy soldier-like rigidity on the parade-ground, his blind obedience to orders and the proficiency with which he could perform antiquated movements like those shown here, taken from a drill-book of 1861.

The soldier's day was an interminable succession of parades, guard duty and non-military chores. Six times a year he would take part in field-days, the nearest thing to the large-scale and realistic manœuvres that European armies were then conducting. But in field-days as late as 1897, the British were still re-creating the tactics of 1815. Year after year, infantrymen were ordered into the time-honoured British square – front rank kneeling, rear ranks standing – to practice resisting massed assaults: a formation suitable for meeting native armies but hardly a preparation for battle with a major continental power.

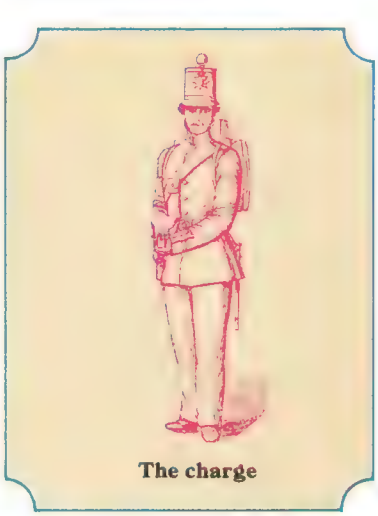


The shoulder

The port

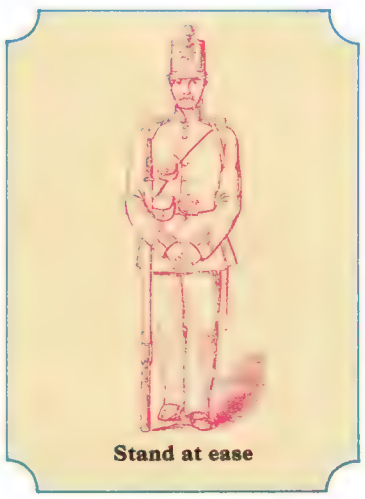


The present



The charge

The trail



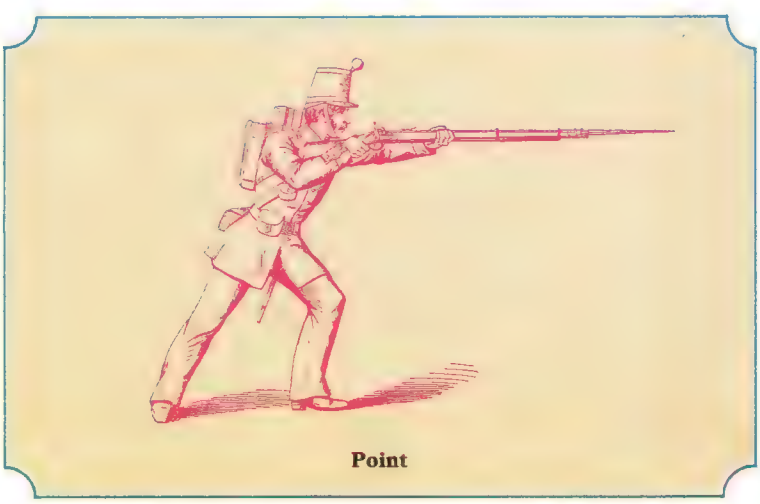
Stand at ease

Using the ramrod

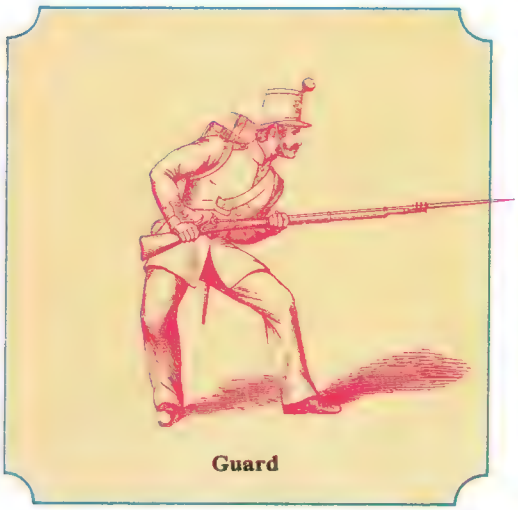
Take aim

Ready to fire

Reloading

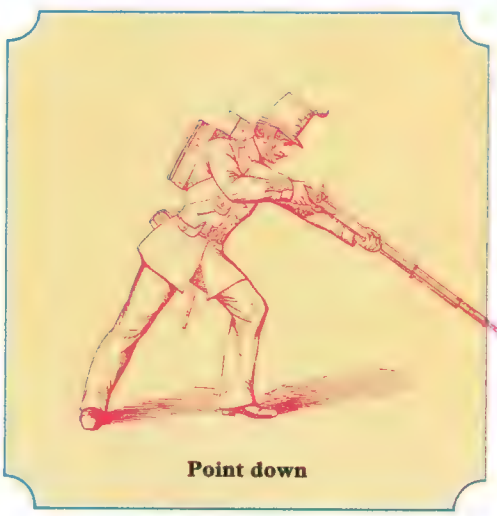


Point

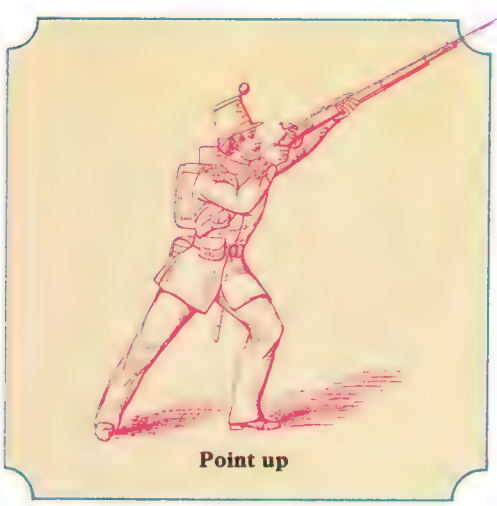


Guard

Low guard



Point down



Point up

Head parry

Shorten arms

The bugle call "Prepare for Cavalry!"

Troops obey the signal to brace themselves to repel cavalry.

When such affairs as sorties and
surprises I'm more wary at,
When I know precisely what is
meant by "commissariat,"
When I have learned what progress
has been made in modern gunnery,
When I know more of tactics than a
novice in a nunnery,
In short, when I've a smattering of
elemental strategy
You'll say a better major-general
has never sat a gee!

Even at the end of the century when other aspects of army life were much reformed, Sandhurst was still an anachronism. In his *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, an anonymous officer in 1936 recalled his Sandhurst experiences in the following words:

"In 1897 when I entered the R.M.C. the whole atmosphere was still Crimean. The Governor and Commandant, Lieutenant-General Sir C. J. East, dated from that year, having joined the Army in 1854. What he governed I have no idea, for the cadets saw him but twice a term, when they arrived and when they departed."

"Our work at this centre of learning was much more archaic than it is today. We studied Phillip's *Manual of Eield Fortification* and Clery's *Minor Tactics*. . . . The first of these books was illustrated with pictures of redans, gabions, wooden fuses, etcetera, all of which were copied into green-covered notebooks . . . and painted in every imaginable colour. I rather liked this work, but why we were called upon to do it I have no idea."

"Military law was a jest. Once a week for two hours at a stretch we sat in a classroom and read the Manual, and when we had exhausted those sections dealing with murder, rape and indecency, we either destroyed Her Majesty's property with our penknives or twiddled our thumbs. Fortunately our instructor was as deaf as a post, for this enabled us to keep up a running conversation, broken on occasions by a wild Irishman named Meldon, banging on his desk to make our teacher look up. Then Meldon would solemnly say, 'Please Sir, may I come up and kick your bottom?' and our unsuspecting master . . . would invariably reply, 'Come to me afterwards, boy, come to me afterwards.'"

Throughout the 19th Century the recruits for the rank and file came from the very lowest level of British society. The army depended largely upon a supply of destitute Irish peasants until the famines of the 1840s drove vast numbers out of Ireland to America. Up to 1847 men enlisted for life, and between 1847 and 1870 for ten years, with the option of going on for 21 years to qualify for a pension. Such long service had two results soldiers with the colours were worn out by age and drink, and the army had no reserve of discharged men to fill out the ranks in time of war. In 1867, a year after Prussia had put 400,000 men in the field against Austria, the total reserves in Great Britain were put at 5,000 men.

As in the 18th Century the recruits were found in pubs, slums and villages. Recruiting parties persuaded the unfortunate or misguided to take the Queen's shilling by a combination of flattery, tales of glory, free drinks and the offer of a lump-sum bounty upon joining the colours, usually instantly spent on drink. In the 1850s and 1860s however, when the reservoir of Irish recruits dried up, an acute recruiting problem arose. Few "respectable" or intelligent members of society were likely to join the army for a shilling a day if they could emigrate to America or the colonies where there were opportunities to better themselves. As an Under-Secretary for War acknowledged: "Our system of recruitment has, I believe, swept to a great extent the refuse of the large towns."

In the Early Victorian period army life was rough and brutal in the extreme. Soldiers in their barracks enjoyed less space than convicts in prison, and their mortality rates were double those of civilians. There were no cookhouses, but simply two copper kettles issued to each mess, in which to boil up three-quarters of a pound of meat per man which, together with a pound of bread, was the extent of the daily rations provided by the nation. Out of the gross pay of seven shillings a week, half was deducted to pay for food over and above the standard issue of bread and meat, and 1s. 10½*d*. for general maintenance and laundry. Recreation consisted of wet canteens – where soldiers could buy liquor and "swipes", the watered-down beer supplied by rascally contractors.

In the Late Victorian Age, however, the building of new barracks and the

continued on p. 968

This badge-emblazoned tunic belonged to Colour-Sergeant Stanley Chantler of the 1st City of London Regiment Royal Fusiliers. Chantler's extraordinary array of medals and ribbons, plus his cups for marksmanship (inset below), made him something of a legend at the turn of the century. Although the green-ribboned General Service medal indicates service abroad, Chantler had no campaign medals; his awards were largely for excellence in peaceable soldiering. Badges won in First Aid and shooting competitions cover the chest and arms of the tunic; stars above the right wrist were for perfect drill, weapon proficiency and smartness. Nevertheless, the tunic bears witness to a long and honourable army career.

Seven shillings a week was all the ordinary private was paid until the 1870s. And half of this wage – unchanged since the 1790s – was automatically deducted for extra food.

THE GORGEOUS BUT IMPRACTICAL uniforms of Waterloo (ra
unchanged until the latter part of the 19th Century. This reflected ar
needed to supply troops with uniforms that were guaranteed to
Office began issuing uniforms in Late Victorian times, the troops (a

ing from far left across to the kilted Highlander) remained virtually
ge when colonels were wealthy men, prepared to spend the vast sums
ipse rival regiments by their theatrical effect. But when the War
r right) took on a less ostentatious and more functional appearance.

provision of cookhouses made the army healthy, if still tough and austere. Weedy recruits from slum homes began to find themselves better housed, better fed and better exercised than they had ever been, and their physique and bearing improved enormously. At the same time, army discipline also instilled regular habits into men who had never had any. Even on the eve of the First World War the army was still the only complete social rescue service provided by the state.

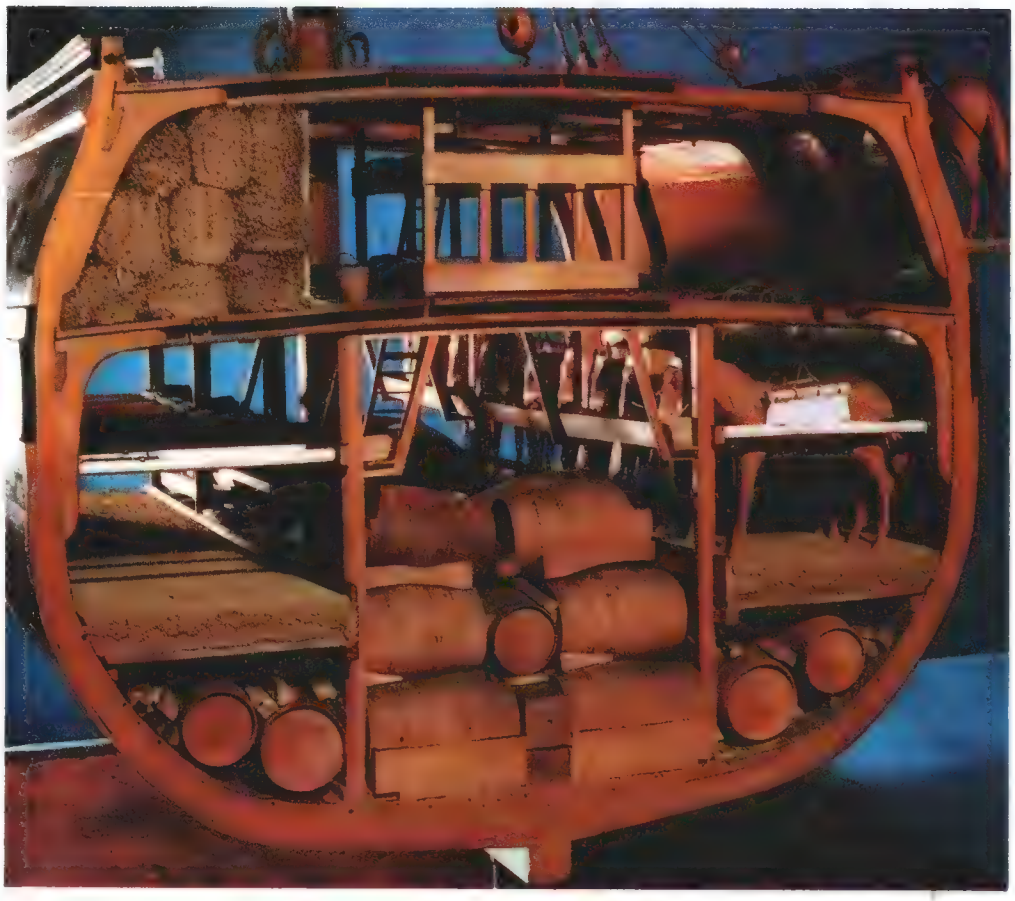
The military day began at 5.30 in summer, and 6.30 in winter. "As soon as the bugle sounded from the guard-house," wrote an old soldier, "the Corporal in charge of our room would shout: 'Show a leg, get out of it, open those blasted windows and down with that sip-tub!' If any man rolled over a few times before getting up, the Corporal would seize hold of his bed and pitch him out on the floor. Each recruit took his turn as orderly man for the day. His duties were to draw the rations, bring the food from the cookhouse and wash up the plates and basins after meals; he also had to take the urinal tub away in the morning and bring it back in the evening. . . . We lived, dined, and slept in the same barrack-room, which we had to scrub out twice a week with hot water and soap."

The military day consisted of parades, fatigues and guard duty. Training hardly went beyond drill and gymnastics. Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, one of the very few ever to rise from enlisted man to Field-Marshal, wrote of cavalry training in the 1870s:

"Antiquated and useless forms of drill, blind obedience to orders, ramrodlike rigidity on parade, and similar time-honoured practices were the chief qualifications by which a regiment was judged."

Field-days, the nearest thing to the large-scale and realistic manœuvres of European armies, took place some six times a year. Right up to the Boer War, the problem set for the troops was the re-enacting of the tactics of Waterloo.

For relaxation outside the barracks there was available only the visit to the pubs of the nearest town where the men could get drunk and pick up women. The grand climax of an evening's drinking was all too often a fight with members of some other, and despised regiment.



Unloading army horses, whether spirited chargers or sturdy Shire horses, called for great care since replacement of maimed animals in distant places was always very difficult.

Horse transports were specially constructed to carry the cavalry and draught animals essential to armies in the days before motorized vehicles became available to the military.

Battling Burnaby of the Blues

There was nobody else quite like Frederick Gustavus Burnaby in the Victorian army. An officer in the élite and fashionable Royal Horse Guards, the Blues, where military duties were light and leave was generous, he was also widely known as a traveller, politician, balloonist and journalist. Reputedly the strongest – and at 6 foot 4 inches the tallest – of the Queen's soldiers, he once bent a poker harmlessly round the Prince of Wales's neck when he came to dine with the regiment.

In 1875, hearing that Asiatic Russia was closed to foreigners, he set off to explore it. Armed with a vast sleeping-bag and accompanied by a malevolent Tartar dwarf, he braved blizzard and snow-drift in an epic ride to Khiva, south of the Aral Sea, a story he told well in a best-selling book.

Travel, both on his own account and as a War Correspondent for *The Times*, subsequently led Fred Burnaby to take a great interest in politics. It was an age when the House of Commons was liberally sprinkled with serving officers, and he entered the political arena as a Tory candidate. Scorning a safe Irish seat, Fred, then 38, chose to run for office in the Liberal stronghold of Birmingham. In the 1880 election he polled 15,000 votes, a startling figure for a Tory in such a hot-bed of radicalism, but not enough for a seat.

The difficult and dangerous drew Fred Burnaby like a magnet. Turning his surplus energies to ballooning, he conceived an ambition to cross the Channel. Despite one hair-raising descent with a burst gasbag over London, he eventually succeeded in 1882.

When politics palled and ballooning lost its appeal he returned to his first love – fighting. He found that active service helped him to forget an excruciatingly painful liver condition, not helped by an unhappy marriage to a consumptive Irish heiress. He had some "rare fun" fighting the Dervishes in the Sudan in 1884, "bagging Fuzzy-Wuzzies" with his shotgun. Back home in peaceful England his spirits flagged, and he determined to join the expedition to relieve General Gordon, besieged by the Mahdi in Khartoum.

Depressed, ill and filled with premonitions of death, the giant cavalry-man, did not have long to wait. On January 22, 1885, at the Battle of Abu Klea, Fred Burnaby was killed.

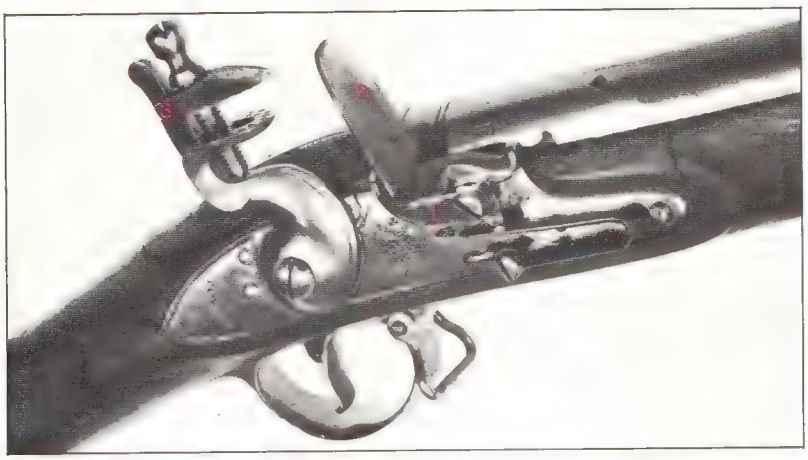
When England heard of his death it mourned him like a national hero and the *Daily Telegraph*, voicing the sorrow of the nation, asserted that his name would live in the annals of Empire "as long as valour and faithfulness unto death remain the watch-words of the sons of the Island Queen."

Colonel Fred Burnaby's blasé manner concealed a zest for life and love of adventure that made him a household word in Victorian England.

GUNS THAT WON THE EMPIRE

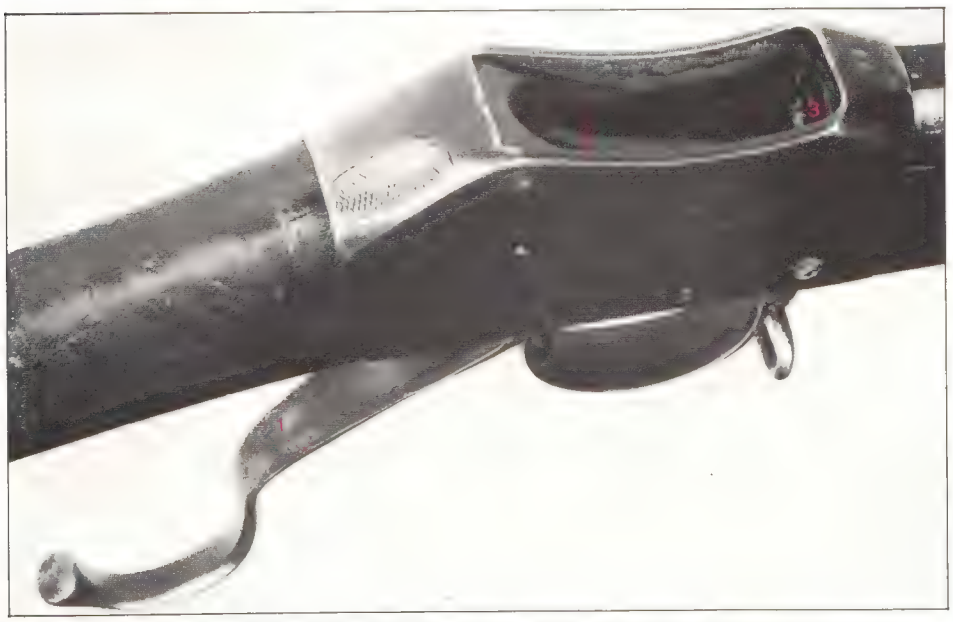
Great Britain won her vast Empire by force of arms of the right type, introduced at the right time. The progression from smooth-bore flintlock to the repeating-rifle and machine-gun, from horse-pistol to Webley revolver, from muzzle-loading cannon to high-velocity field piece is pictured in these pages.

In 1853 the Enfield percussion rifle, with a maximum range of 1,000 yards, replaced the flintlocks. When the trigger was pulled, an explosive percussion-cap, placed on the nipple (1), was hit by the hammer (2) thus igniting the powder and firing the bullet.

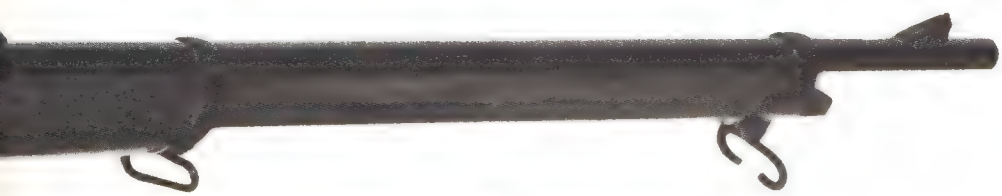


The flintlock of the Brown Bess was simple and, in dry weather, effective. Powder was placed in the pan (1) and the pan cover and steel (2) closed. The cock containing the flint (3) was then locked back. Pulling the trigger struck the flint against the steel, creating sparks which ignited the powder in the pan and the barrel, expelling the musket-ball.

The Brown Bess musket was said to have first been ordered by the Duke of Marlborough in 1702. A 46-inch, smooth-bore weapon with an effective range of 80 yards, it remained in service with the British Army until 1840. "Brown" probably referred to the stained walnut stock; "Bess" was either a nickname or a corruption of the German word for flintlock, *Büchse*.



In 1871 the army adopted the Martini-Henry breech-loading rifle. When the lever behind the trigger-guard (1) was depressed, the breech (2) opened; a used round was extracted, and a fresh round inserted in the chamber (3). Raising the lever closed the breech for firing. This single-shot weapon was replaced by magazine-rifles.



The Lee-Enfield, a repeating-rifle with a ten-round magazine and maximum range of 2,800 yards, first showed its merits at Omdurman in 1898 by stopping charging Dervishes at 500 yards while the Martini-Henrys were only effective at 300 yards. So good was its basic design that, with modifications, the Lee-Enfield was used in both world wars.

The British soldier and his Brown Bess formed a powerful team.

Sidearms for Gentlemen

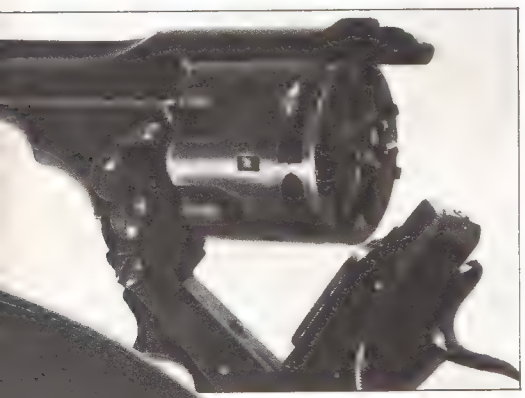
In the mêlée of battle, pistols – reserved for use by officers – were prized, for they were deadly at close range, and in desperate hand-to-hand combat they could be used as clubs.

The flintlock pistol, invented in 1675, was the standard officer's weapon for a little over 150 years, until, in the mid-19th Century, Samuel Colt, an American, invented a pistol that combined the newly introduced percussion-cap with a revolving cylinder mechanism. The War Office bought large numbers of Colt's revolutionary six-shooters for their reliable and rapid firing. Other gunsmiths added their improvements, culminating in the Webley. Adopted by the army in 1887, successive models of the Webley served generations of British officers right through two world wars.

A flintlock pistol (above) worked on exactly the same principle as flintlock muskets. Gunsmiths took pride in turning these deadly custom-made weapons into works of art through engravings.

The Webley Mark IV, which was widely used during the Boer War, broke (upper right) at the centre permitting speedy loading of six brass cartridges into the cylinder.

Colt's "Navy model" pistol was, appropriately enough, issued in vast quantities to the Royal Navy. A powerful lever rod (1) rammed the charges into each of its six chambers. Cocking the hammer (2) rotated the cylinder, bringing it into firing position for the hammer to strike when the trigger was pulled.

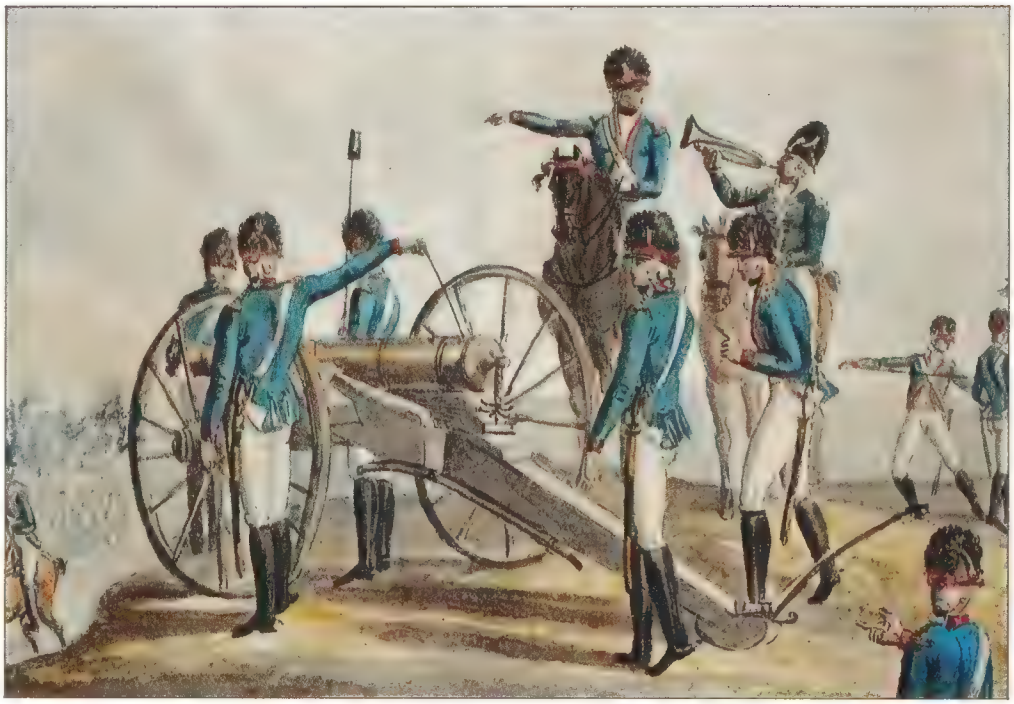


A mid-18th-Century cavalry officer fires one of his two horse-pistols, which were kept in holsters attached to the saddle.

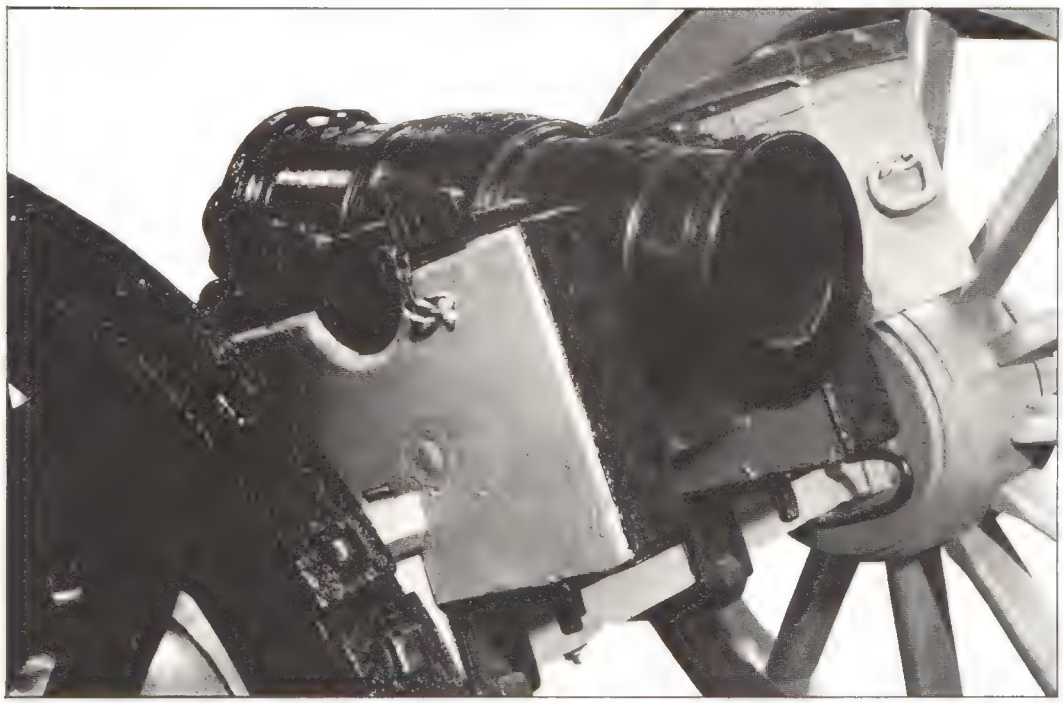
Queen of Battles

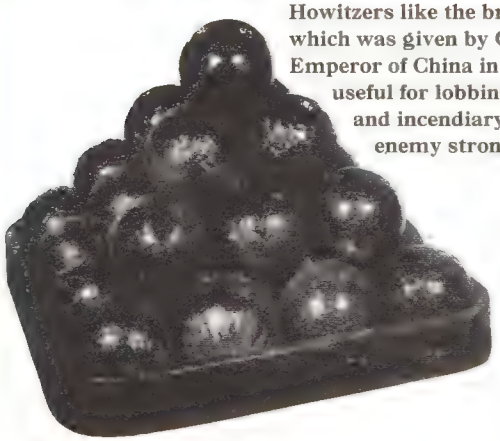
The British Army set up a permanent artillery corps as early as 1716, and thus anticipated Napoleon's tribute to the cannon as the "Queen of Battles." By 1727, this branch was christened the Royal Regiment of Artillery and it grew into a seasoned force during the war-torn 18th Century. But essentially gunnery changed little between the Middle Ages and 1881. Only then did breech-loading cannon with their rifled barrels finally displace the honoured but obsolete smooth-bore muzzle loaders.

Modern guns had been given a trial between 1859 and 1870, but officials, deciding that the breech-loading mechanism was both complicated and expensive, returned to muzzle-loading. When the breech-loading cannon's faults were corrected, it became obvious to army officials that the future belonged to the new weapon, whose accuracy, range and speed of reloading made it greatly superior to the muzzle loaders.



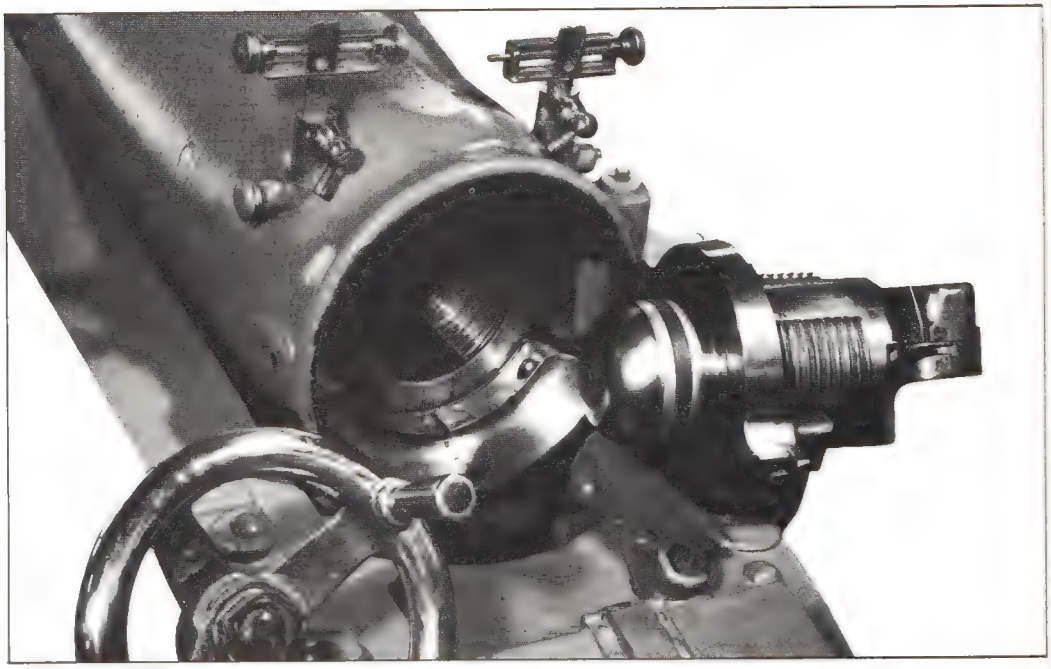
Men of the Honourable Artillery Company fire a cannon at the French in 1796. Gunners used solid round shot against buildings, clusters of balls (grape-shot) against massed troops.



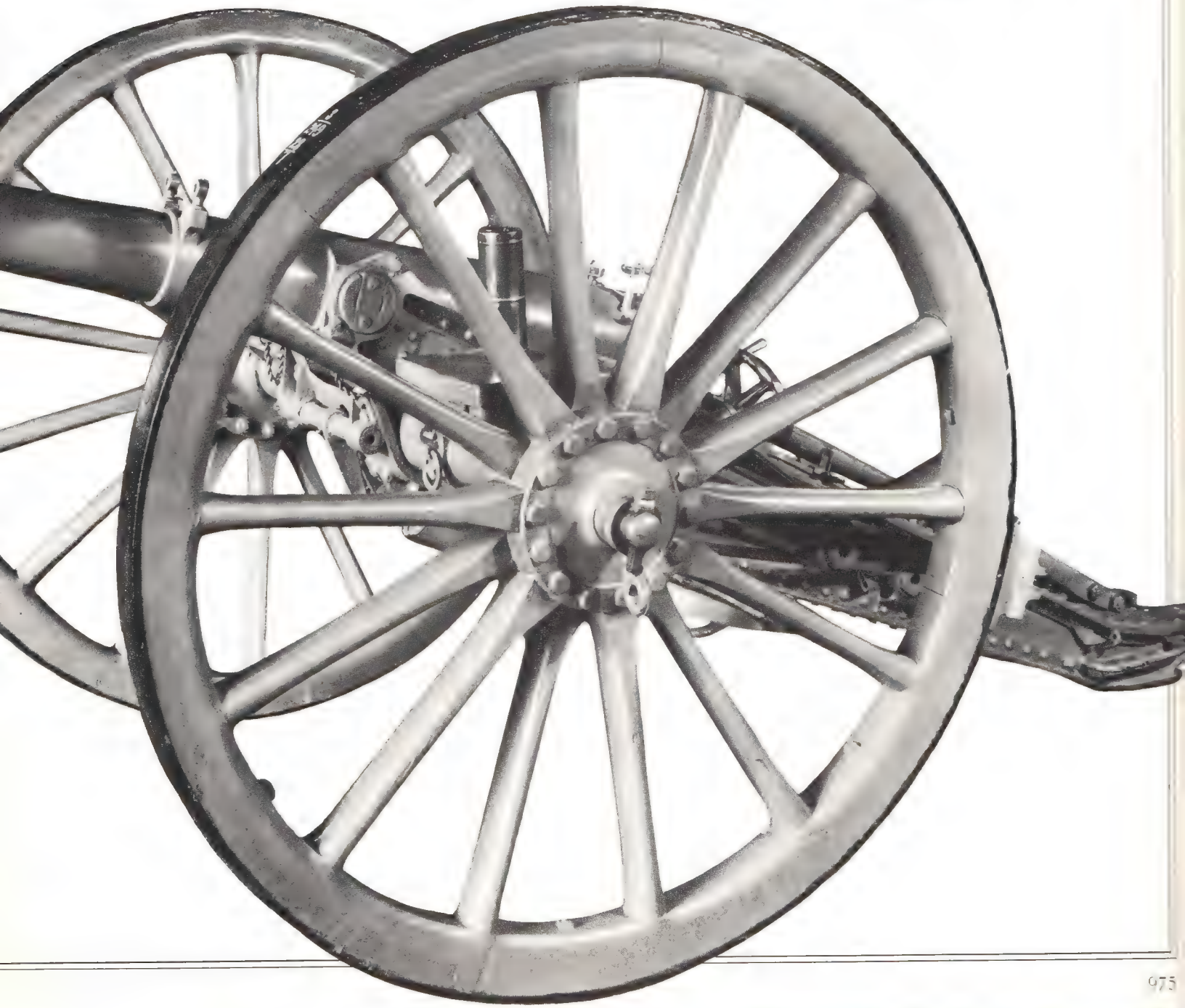


Howitzers like the brass 5·5-inch model (above) which was given by George III to the Emperor of China in 1793, were especially useful for lobbing round shot (left) and incendiary shells over barriers into enemy strongpoints.

The interior of the 12-pounder barrel shows the spiral grooving cut into it. This imparts spin to the shell as it leaves the barrel and improves accuracy.



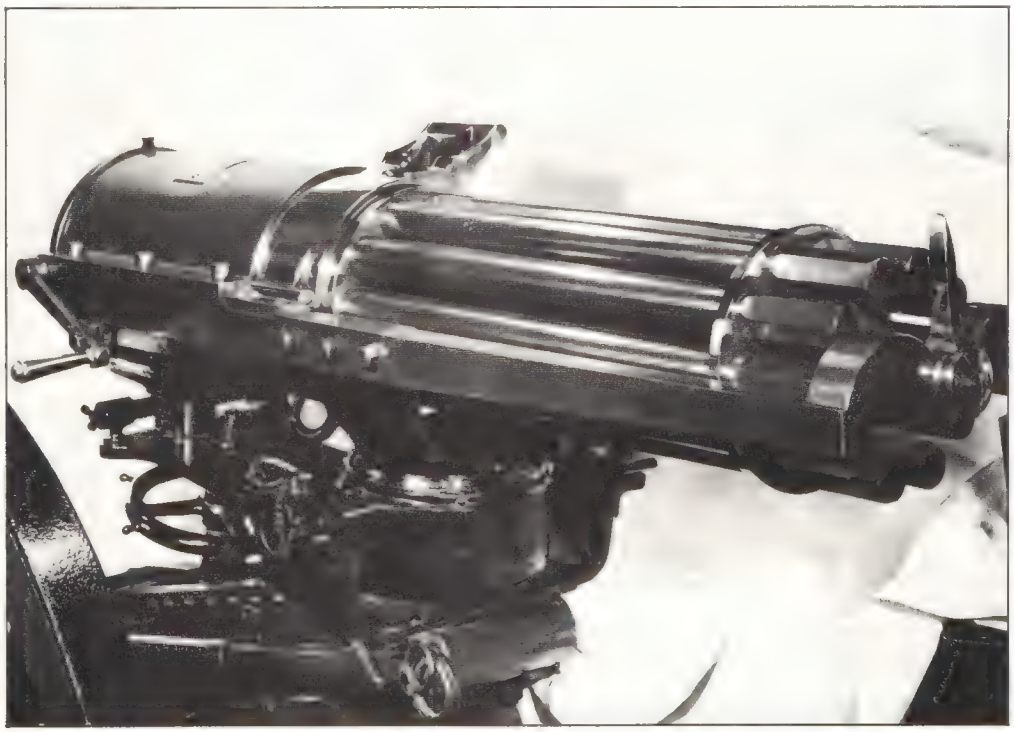
The easily handled 12-pounder (below) named for the weight of its shell, had a simple and effective mechanism (right) that enabled it to be loaded and fired quickly. This field-piece, with its 5,600-yard range, became the army's standard gun in 1896 and proved its worth and reliability during the Boer War.



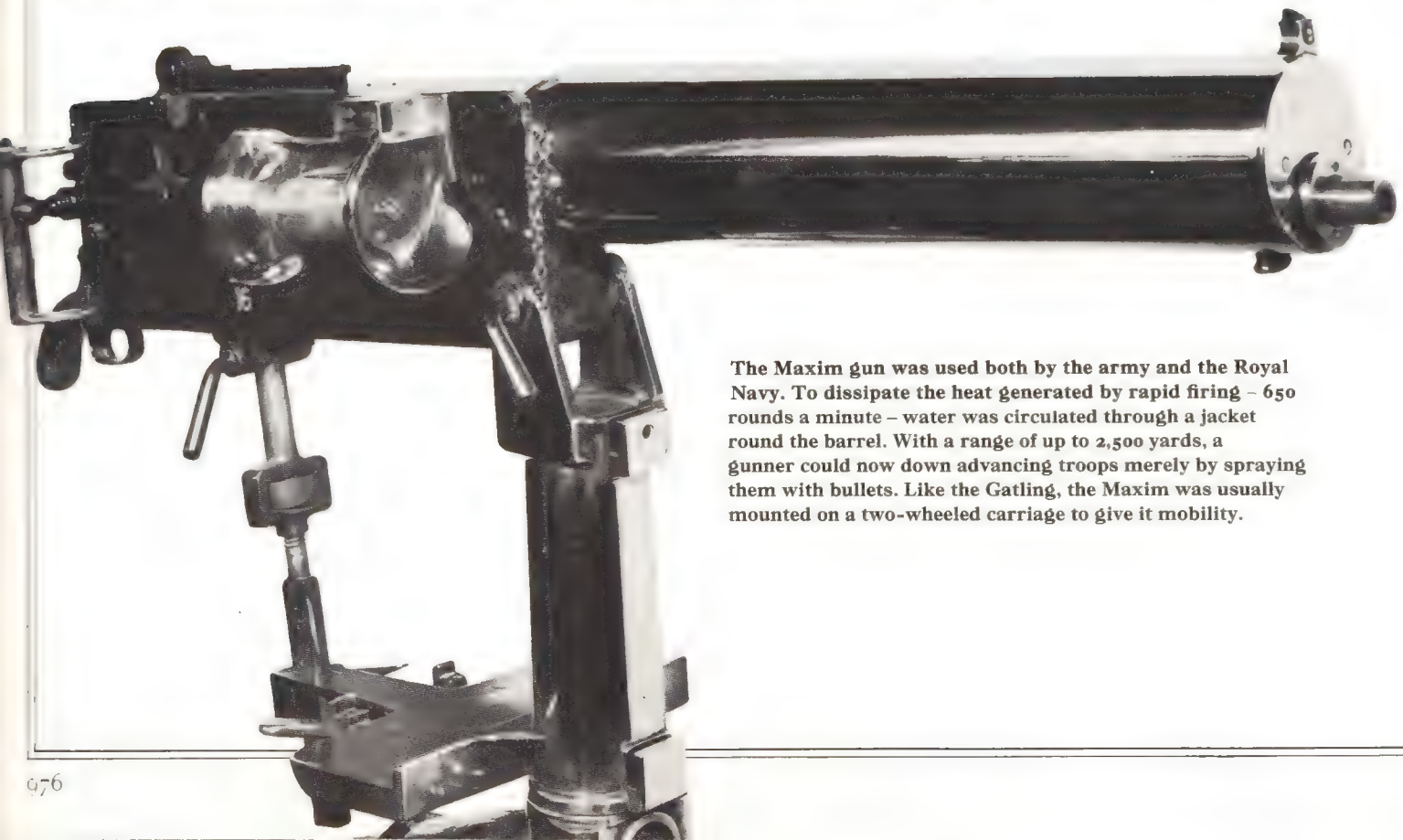
A Hail of Lead

The British Army acquired its first machine-gun – the Gatling – in 1871. An American invention, it consisted of a cluster of manually loaded barrels that were rotated and discharged by cranking a handle. In a few years the Gatling was put to deadly effect in colonial wars. But it was a cumbersome weapon and faulty cartridges often led to jams – disadvantages that were rectified when the Maxim machine-gun was adopted in 1891.

The weapon invented by Hiram Maxim, American born but a naturalized Briton, was the first to use the force of recoil to load, fire and eject cartridges that were fed continuously on a webbing belt. The machine-gun's hail of lead ushered in a new era of warfare in which one man could hold off countless opponents. Hilaire Belloc's bit of doggerel summed up the technical advantage that machine-guns gave against native masses: "Whatever happens, we have got the Maxim gun and they have not."



A trained crew could fire 500 rounds a minute from this early Gatling (left) at ranges of up to 2,500 yards. While one man cranked the handle to turn the barrels another fed in ammunition through an elevated aperture at the rear (1). As the cartridges fell into the channels behind the barrels (2) rods with firing-pins (3) pushed them into the chamber, fired cartridges as chambers rotated into position, and ejected empty cases.



The Maxim gun was used both by the army and the Royal Navy. To dissipate the heat generated by rapid firing – 650 rounds a minute – water was circulated through a jacket round the barrel. With a range of up to 2,500 yards, a gunner could now down advancing troops merely by spraying them with bullets. Like the Gatling, the Maxim was usually mounted on a two-wheeled carriage to give it mobility.

Lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson won the Victoria Cross by stopping a German attack in 1916 with a Maxim. Both sides used this gun.

II. Good Life and Reform

The months between October and March made up the trooping season, when fresh drafts left England for India or other imperial stations, and time-expired men or battalions due for home-posting returned. Long voyages by troopship were an essential part of the experience of the imperial army. Up to 2,000 men, together with horses, could be crammed into a single vessel.

"The troop deck at night is a weird picture", wrote an officer of the Eighth Division, "and it is impossible to move about save on one's hands and knees – the hammocks swing so near the deck. The deck itself is covered with sleeping forms in more or less picturesque attitudes. . . . After a couple of parades a day, comprising physical drill and kit inspections, the troops are at liberty to spend their time as they wish. To some, the monotony of the voyage weighs disagreeably, whilst others divide their time between reading and gazing at the wonders of the deep . . . spouting whales, sporting dolphins, and the porpoises, flying fish. . . . Perhaps the majority are absorbed in gaming schools of cards, 'house-on-the-line' and the 'crown and anchor.'"

At the end of a three-week voyage through the Mediterranean, the oven-hot Red Sea and the Indian Ocean lay Bombay, the fetid gateway to India, the British Army's second – perhaps its first – home. For generations of British soldiers right down to the Second World War, the first acquaintance with India was made in the vast transit camp at Deolali. From Deolali the new drafts proceeded to their garrisons in slow, suffocatingly dusty and cockroach-ridden trains, moving by night and resting in camps during the day.

Despite the ferocious heat in summer, life in India – celebrated in the verses of Rudyard Kipling – was good for the rank and file. Each battalion had its native bazaar to supply it with cheap food and every necessity from bicycles to contraceptives. Even the privates had servants to wait upon them: boys to clean the bungalows; punkah-wallahs to keep the large fans or punkahs in motion without pause during the hot season from March to October; bhisti-wallahs to bring the water; tatty-wallahs to pour cooling water over the tatties, or woven-straw doors that covered the doorways on the sunny side of the bungalows; sweepers, latrine-wallahs, cooks, laundrymen, and cleaning-boys to polish boots, brass and equipment. In the winter there was plenty of sport, especially football and boxing. Most of the men kept pet dogs. Married soldiers as well as officers and N.C.O.s had their wives with them; and the social life of the garrison reflected the rigid class distinctions of Victorian society. As one private soldier recalled:

"I often did grin at some Battalion outdoor function, such as Regimental Sports, to watch the ladies according to their different social classes collect in groups apart from one another: one group of officers' wives with the Colonel's wife in command, another of senior N.C.O.s' wives with the Regimental Sergeant-Major's wife in command, and then the wives of the sergeants, corporals and privates, each group parading separately."

For the unmarried private, supervised brothels in the bazaars of garrison towns were the only source of female society.

Officers in India enjoyed a life of leisured splendour: "If you like to be waited on and relieved of home worries," wrote Winston Churchill of his service with the 4th Hussars, "India was perfection. All you had to do was hand over all your uniform and clothes to the dressing boy, and your ponies to the syce [groom], and your money to the butler, and you never need trouble any more."

Instead, you were free to enjoy a round of magnificent dinners and balls in mess or in Government House, to hunt tiger and shoot duck; above all you were free to play polo. "It was upon this, apart from duty," wrote Churchill, "that all our interest was concentrated."

Unless on active service, the duties of the military day in India were not exacting: parade of the battalion or regiment at six in the morning; an hour and a half's drill or manœuvre; breakfast and orderly-room parade at which defaulters and prisoners were dealt with; then prolonged refuge from the fierce heat of the day until five in the afternoon; finally polo, a return for the officers – to "hot baths, rest, and at eight o'clock dinner, to the strains of the regimental band and the clinking of ice in well-filled glasses," as Churchill observed.

The bill for the leisure and luxuries of army life in India was submitted when the army was called on to back the police in quelling communal disturbances in the close, crowded and stinking cities; or when it marched on punitive expeditions up the valleys of the North-West Frontier where Pathans picked off the unskilled or

A variety of dazzling turbans helped make the Indian Army the most resplendent imperial force. Its

unwary with well-aimed bullets.

For it was to keep the internal peace of the Indian Empire and to guard it from foreign invasions that about a half of the British Army's infantry was always stationed in India. However, this was only one element of the British military strength in the sub-continent. The other was the Indian Army, made up of Indian other ranks and British officers.

The Indian Mutiny of 1857 cast a long shadow, for however much individual British officers loved and trusted the sepoys in their Indian Army regiments, the British military system in India as a whole in the Late Victorian and Edwardian eras was founded on distrust of the Indian troops. From the Mutiny until the eve of the Second World War, the Indian Army was provided with no artillery of its own except mountain batteries, while its equipment and weapons were deliberately kept less modern than the British Army's. Finally, there was always a safe 1 to 3 proportion of white to native troops: one British battalion stationed with two Indian battalions in an Indian army brigade.

Although the two armies served so intimately together, there was also a professional gulf between the officer corps of the British and Indian armies, even though the personnel of both corps was always British. Entrance to the Indian officer corps was reserved to the men with higher pass records in the Sandhurst entrance examination. Moreover, only in the Indian Army was it possible for an officer to live on his pay; and so the "Indian" officer tended to be both more of a careerist and of less wealthy and aristocratic origins than his opposite number in the British service.

At the end of the 19th Century the Indian Army numbered some 150,000 men, twice the size of the British Army in India. When Lord Kitchener was Commander-in-Chief in India from 1902 to 1909, he reorganized the forces into three parts according to function: covering troops, based mostly in the North-West Frontier province, to provide constant cover against tribal incursions, or against possible invasion by the Afghans or Russians; a field army, which would eventually repel such an invasion and was not intended for service outside India; and an internal security force.

A myth arose and long persisted that the Indian Army was the grand source of the strategic power of the British Empire, so far as land forces were concerned. In support of this belief, historians have glibly listed all the imperial campaigns in which Indian troops were supposed to have taken part during the 19th Century.

regiments bore such exotic names as the 34th Prince Albert Victor's Own Poona Horse.

The fact was that India was an immense source of strategic weakness to Britain, for 50 British battalions had to be stationed there permanently. The use of Indian "troops" – in the Boer War, for instance, where they served in medical units, or even in a large-scale campaign such as the invasion of Abyssinia in 1868, in which 10,000 Indian troops fought – still far from made up for the 50 British battalions always assigned to India.

In addition to the British Army in India itself, there were the other British troops who protected the route to India from their stations in Cyprus, Egypt and the Sudan, Somaliland and Aden. It was the possession of India that involved Britain in rivalry with other great powers, such as France and Russia, from the Mediterranean to the border between Burma and French Indo-China. Whatever India's economic value, India's military contribution could never constitute a net military asset for it never began to compensate for the strategic drain that India imposed on British strength, or for the risks of British embroilment with other powers.

The problem of finding troops for the Empire, and above all for India, dominated reforms of the organization of the British Army in the period between the Crimean War and the First World War. Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1874 in Prime Minister William Gladstone's second government, tried to solve the fundamental question of manpower in two ways. He brought home some 20,000 British soldiers from "white" colonies such as Canada and New Zealand, having turned over the problem of local defence to locally raised forces. In Britain, he grouped the regiments of the regular army with the Militia and the Volunteers in large county depots. (He hoped that this would stimulate enlistment from the Militia into the regulars. In fact, it was the collapse of British agriculture in the 1870s under the competition of cheap North American corn and the consequent impoverishment of the farm labourer that solved the recruiting problem.)

In 1881, all regiments were transformed into new two-battalion regiments. The two battalions alternated between home and imperial service, the depot battalion acting as a training and drafting unit.

Cardwell further tried to ease the allied problems of recruitment and reserves by new, shorter, terms of service and better conditions in the army. Henceforward service was to be for 12 years: for the Indian Army, six years with the colours and six in the reserve; for men at home, three years with the colours and nine in the reserve. The difficulty was that the home battalions, amounting to only half the army, were in no way organized and ready to act as a field force, either in defence of Britain, or in Europe.

However, from Cardwell's time on wards the problem of finding such a force was intermittently recognized; in the future it was the opposing needs of a field army at home and an imperial garrison that provided the central plot of the history of the army. After 1900, with the recognition of the strategic threat that was posed by increasingly aggressive German ambitions, the problem became more pressing. In 1904 the Conservative War Secretary, H.O.Arnold-Forster, all but admitted that there was a basic compatibility between the two roles assigned to the British Army – European field force and imperial garrison – when he proposed the creation of two new armies, a general service army on long enlistments, and a home service army on short enlistments. But his plan was rejected.

In 1906, when Richard Haldane became War Minister, the German danger had grown still more apparent; this, and the improvement of relations with France, Britain's traditional enemy, in 1904, opened the way to unofficial contacts between the British and French general staffs. Haldane had now urgently to reconcile the demands of the Empire, most of all India, with the need to find troops for the military support of France.

Haldane and his professional advisers agreed that a British Expeditionary Force must be formed out of whatever troops remained in the United Kingdom once imperial needs had been met: that is, out of the home or depot battalions. The B.E.F. was therefore fixed at six super divisions – each comprised of three instead of the traditional two brigades – plus a cavalry division.

Yet there was another and much more complex problem for Haldane and his advisers to solve: that presented by the British Army's unfitness to meet a European enemy in the field. The setbacks that had shocked Britain during the Boer War had demonstrated how almost a century of imperial warfare had led to amateurism, to narrowness of mind, to professional neglect and wholly outdated tactics and methods – the shortcomings of an army accustomed to easy campaigns against native irregulars. As a Committee of Inquiry reported a year after the war, the evidence "shows in the clearest manner the prevalence among the junior commissioned ranks of a lack of professional knowledge and skill, and of any wish to study the science and master the art of their profession." Or as one witness put it, "keenness is out of fashion . . . it is not the correct form."

Nor was it easy for the minority of keen officers to train their men, whether in England or abroad, because of the general way of life of the "imperial" army. As the committee's report put it:

"Under the existing system the officer rarely sees the men for whose military efficiency he is responsible. They are largely employed in non-military duties, such as waiting in canteens and regimental institutes, the charge of cricket and tennis grounds . . . in addition to the large number constantly required for fatigues." And it went on to reflect upon the uneducated and frequently unintelligent men who made up the army.

"If the terms offered are attractive only to men whose intelligence is underdeveloped, it is impossible to make them soldiers of the class required in modern warfare, with the same amount of training that will be sufficient for men whose mental calibre is higher at the time when they enter the army."

The lack of education and sometimes intelligence among the rank and file pervaded the whole question of military discipline and tactics in the field. Such men could blindly and doggedly obey their officers and N.C.O.s in parade-ground battles against natives; but against intelligent, cunning foes like the Boer farmers they were helpless. The Committee spared neither Woolwich nor Sandhurst, commenting that "the cadets cannot be expected to derive much benefit from their instruction when it is clearly established that they have absolutely no incentive to work." Although the passing out standard had certainly been set low enough, yet "there is much reason to fear that even those cadets who fail to attain this standard have been comissioned none the less."

It is to Haldane's and his advisers' abiding credit that in a few short years they succeeded in remaking the British Army. So well did they do their job that the army not only outfought its German opponents in the campaign of 1914, but was able to act as the essential framework for the creation of huge citizen armies representing a cross-section of the nation, with all its talents and skills in the four years of war that followed.

The Haldane reforms changed the British Army from top to bottom. The War Office was reorganized on logical principles and for the first time there was set up a General Staff on the European pattern, with a clear division of duties. For the first time also, a standard manual of Staff methods and army organization in the field was prepared and issued. Even before Haldane's time, the old drill-books had been replaced with modern tactical manuals in 1904–05, a result of the hard lessons of the Boer War. The parade-ground line and volley-firing of imperial warfare disappeared. A German observer of British manœuvres in 1904 noted with approval that "the British infantry showed great skill in the use of ground. Their thin lines of khaki-clad skirmishers were scarcely visible."

With the creation of a General Staff and standard Staff methods, the Staff College at Camberley acquired a sense of purpose it had never enjoyed before. The war game, complete with full dummy orders and schedules, was introduced. The cavalry learned to fight on foot with rifles; to act as the eyes of the Commander-in-Chief instead of charging with lance or sabre. New quick-firing field-guns were introduced. The British were equipped with machine-guns on the scale of two per battalion, the same scale as in the German Army. The mobilization and movement of the B.E.F. to northern France was worked out in complete detail. Ironically, such planning demanded a return to conscription, the institution abandoned in the 17th Century. As a result of all these innovations, on the outbreak of war in 1914 the army moved with a precision, efficiency and speed, and on a scale, never approached by the improvised expeditions of the Victorian imperial army. But then, the Victorian army – despite its unchallenged reputation for courage – could never have met the requirements of the first of the great international conflicts that were to ravage Europe in the 20th Century.

H.M.S. Minotaur, 1867

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THE NAVY: IMPERIAL PEACE KEEPERS